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Colorado Begins Work On New Phase Of Statewide Communications System

DENVER (date)—The state of Colorado today formally announced that work has begun on a new phase of the statewide digital communications system infrastructure that will enhance communications for public-safety agencies in Denver, its suburbs, and the metropolitan areas of Douglas and Jefferson counties.

When statewide installation is complete, the 800 MHz Motorola ASTRO[®] digital trunked system infrastructure will provide public-safety and governmental agencies everywhere in Colorado access to sophisticated communications technology that would be much more costly for many agencies to purchase on their own.

This latest work phase on the statewide system builds on a shared Motorola 800 MHz ASTRO communications system already in place in Douglas and Jefferson counties. The counties completed installation of the system in June 1998. Their shared system infrastructure provides public-safety and other government agencies communications coverage over more than 2,000 square miles.

Hardware installation for this phase of the statewide system infrastructure is currently underway. The state and Motorola already have identified specific sites in the

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existing Douglas/Jefferson County system, plus other area sites that also will be used for the statewide system.

“This new work signals another major step toward our goal of statewide communications interoperability,” said Mike Borrego, telecommunications manager, Information Technology Services Division, for the state of Colorado.

Colorado officials project the entire statewide system will include 120 radio sites, each supporting five channels, five regional dispatch centers, and about 10,000 mobile and portable radios. The system will provide approximately 95 percent mobile coverage throughout the state along major highways. The system will be compliant with the Project 25 standard for public-safety communications systems.

Douglas and Jefferson counties implemented their shared communications system as part of an intergovernmental agreement created in 1998. The agreement outlined specifically how the two counties would implement and utilize a shared communications infrastructure, expanding an existing 800 MHz system infrastructure in Douglas County. The Douglas/Jefferson County system is the first in Colorado to link multiple government entities and jurisdictions through a common digital communications infrastructure.

“The system we have in place today means public-safety personnel have the most sophisticated communications capability available and can take the home-town communications features they depend on daily everywhere they travel in the two-county area,” said Don Christensen, Under Sheriff for Douglas County and board chair of the Cooperative Communications System (CCS). Arapahoe, Douglas and Jefferson counties, the city of Aurora and the state of Colorado created the CCS in 1997 to govern the operation of the future shared statewide system infrastructure.

“This system has given us the interoperability, coverage and other features we needed in a communications system, and has certainly helped bring the statewide communications network we envisioned in 1997 closer to reality,” Christensen added.

The Douglas/Jefferson County shared system includes eight sites. Douglas had two in place initially and the counties jointly developed two more. Jefferson County added four sites of its own. More than 17 agencies in Douglas County currently operate almost 1,000 mobile and portable radios on the system. That number eventually may grow to as many as 2,500 mobile and portable radios. Jefferson County projects they will have 28 agencies and as many as 1,000 mobile and portable radios on the system



by the end of the year. That number eventually may grow to as many as 1,500 radio units.

The counties use Douglas County's Motorola SmartZone™ switch to automatically "hand-off" communications from one antenna site to another as personnel travel throughout the two-county area, as well as to perform other system management functions.

The vision for the statewide communications system first took shape in 1993 following a Papal visit and outdoor mass attended by some 400,000 people.

While the event went smoothly, law enforcement agencies working the event realized greater communications interoperability was critical to managing events of this size. Public-safety agencies also realized communications interoperability would be critical in other emergency situations that might require response from multiple agencies and jurisdictions. The 1999 Columbine High School shooting incident is an example of that type of emergency.

In 1997, meetings among officials from Arapahoe, Douglas and Jefferson counties, the city of Aurora and the state lead to a memorandum of understanding and the creation of the CCS.

Since the Douglas/Jefferson county shared system has been operational, it has demonstrated to agencies throughout Colorado that the shared communications infrastructure approach can provide the interoperability and other features and capabilities the state's public-safety agencies have wanted for a long time.

"It has been a long-range dream of everyone in public-safety in Colorado that officers would be able to travel from Cheyenne to Pueblo and be able to talk with one another all along the way," said J.D. Main, electronics maintenance supervisor for the city of Aurora. "Soon they will be able to do that confidently."

The system technology will enable radios to be grouped into pre-arranged talk groups, which can be activated by system dispatchers, as emergency situations require. By sharing existing sites, the environmental impact of the new state system will be minimal.

With spectrum for new radio systems virtually unavailable, the shared state system also enables the spectrum already allocated to agencies within the state to be used efficiently for the benefit of everyone.

"The Colorado Legislature has been looking forward to this improvement in

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communications. Time does saves lives and this system saves time and provides excellent communications to our Public safety Agencies,” said State Senator Norma Anderson who sponsored the legislation to fund the system.

“The system Jefferson and Douglas counties have in place now, and the statewide system that’s being implemented, will enable everyone in public-safety to provide more services more efficiently,” said Randy Smith, communications manager, Jefferson County. “This will have a tremendous impact on the health, safety and well-being of all who live in the state. It’s a benefit that is impossible to put a price tag on.”

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